Intra-Communal Violence in Southwest Russia and the Government Reaction to Extremism

A Senior Honors Thesis

By

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the recent trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in the southwestern Volga-Ural region of the Russian Federation. On July 19, 2012, a radical Islamic sect, frustrated with regional policies hostile to Islamic fundamentalism, perpetrated an unprecedented terrorist attack against Muslim religious leaders in the city of Kazan, Tatarstan. Such deadly intra-communal violence triggered a strong military response by the Russian government, inciting local opposition from ethnic nationalist groups. Through comparative analysis of original Russian media sources, I assess the potential threat of religious extremism and national separatism in the republics of Tatarstan and neighboring Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to these developments.

I conclude that the ever more forceful government response to secure the 2014 Sochi Olympics and resurging Islamic terrorism following the NATO withdrawal from Central Asia threatens to radicalize more Volga-Ural Muslim individuals. Furthermore, though national separatist groups increased radical activity after the Kazan terrorist attacks, the regional governments of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan strategically manipulate ethnic nationalism to acquire greater autonomy from the federal center. Ultimately, the majority of Tatar and Bashkir society generally rejects the calls for religious extremism and national separatism across southwestern Russia. The results of this project contribute to the growing body of research on the dangers of ethnic minority conflicts for Russian internal security and the international community.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the international press has widely reported on the various ethnic minority conflicts throughout the North Caucasus in southwestern Russia. Violence has particularly plagued the republics of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. The Federal Security Service (FSB), the main domestic security agency of Russia, continues to actively pursue extremists in these areas. Over 70,000 troops still remain in Chechnya today with 250,000 troops stationed throughout the North Caucasus.[1] Internal and border security represents a huge concern for the Russian government, especially with the upcoming 2014 Winter Olympics in the city of Sochi, located on the coast of the Black Sea in this unstable region. A recently active warzone not surprisingly receives more attention, but the following incident suggests the call for armed resistance against state authority potentially stretches beyond the North Caucasus.

In the heart of the autonomous republic Tatarstan along the majestic Volga River, the grand city Kazan serves as an epicenter for economic activity southeast of Moscow, proudly proclaiming their government-approved title as the "Third Capital" of Russia. The city upheld until recently a high reputation for being a sanctuary of religious tolerance for Orthodox Christians and adherents of Islam. Such a lofty claim was brutally shattered on the morning of July 19, 2012. At 11:00am, Mufti Ildus Faizov, head of the Muslim community in Kazan, left his home and approached his car, preparing for his regular commute to work. Steps from his vehicle, a bomb was detonated in a three-part explosion that hurled Mufti Faizov backwards through the air. Less than an hour earlier, Deputy Vailulla Yakupov, head of the Muslim Educational Department in Kazan, was shot multiple times in the lobby of his apartment building. Though severely injured, Mufti Faizov survived the attack; however, the wounds sustained by Deputy Yakupov proved fatal, who died in his car on the way to the hospital.[2]

This well-coordinated terrorist strike shocked the religious community of Tatarstan and unnerved federal officials. Initial reports speculated such action was motivated by extremists' outrage over religious policies hostile to Islamic fundamentalism. Mufti Faizov and Deputy Yakupov had worked to promote initiatives supporting a traditional and moderate interpretation of Sunni Islam, challenging the stricter tenets of Salafism, a decades-old reform movement often associated with jihad in the present day. In a clear sign of the government's apprehension, President Vladimir Putin immediately sent a message to political leaders in Tatarstan to express his concerns about the incident: "These events remind us once again that the situation in our country is far from ideal. What has happened is a serious signal."[3] A few days later, a previously unheard of radical group called the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan claimed responsibility for the attacks. President Putin initiated a swift crackdown, indiscriminately arresting dozens of Muslim men in search of the perpetrators. Key ethnic nationalist groups condemned the questionable detentions and organized a series of protests in opposition to the government. Amidst these increasing tensions, the likelihood of further conflict appeared to be rising.

On the morning of July 19, 2012, I was touring the iconic white and blue Qol Sharif Mosque, the largest mosque in Russia and a common work site of Mufti Faizov and Deputy Yakupov, when the car bombing and shooting occurred. The shock of the tragedy was soon replaced by the nagging need to understand the why behind these atrocities. I utilized the remainder of my intensive Russian language study abroad program in the neighboring city of Ufa, Bashkortostan to begin exploring the ramifications of the Kazan terrorist attacks. The curiosity drawn from this incident ultimately served as the impetus to write this senior honors thesis. Beginning with a careful review of relevant history and contemporary literature, this

study explores the current threat of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to these developments.

The phenomenological methodology of Constant Comparative Content Analysis serves as an effective framework for examining these topics of interest. After a brief discussion on federal government interference and the natural tendency for sensationalism in the media, I critically review various original Russian news sources with a specific focus on four core categories: federal security operations, influence of religious institutions, pursuit for regional autonomy, and identity formation. Analyzing these phenomena through the scope of ethnic nationalism and Islamic radicalization provides for more nuanced observations on the effects of the Kazan terrorist attacks in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The following explanations establish the conceptual foundation for drawing conclusions from this qualitative news source data.

A myriad of differing theories and models on the dynamics of ethnic nationalism and Islamic radicalization presently operate in the field of international studies. For the purposes of this research, the succeeding definitions function as the litmus test for measuring the progression and combination of these two trends in the target areas. Esteemed scholar Anthony D. Smith defines nationalism as the formation of "a named and self-defined community whose members cultivate common myths, memories, symbols and values, possess and disseminate a distinctive public culture, reside in and identify with a historical homeland, and create and disseminate common laws and shared customs."[4] The ethnic classification also involves emphasis on shared genealogical descent and perceived bonds of kinship between members of the group.[5] I investigate these processes in the development of Tatar and Bashkir identity in addition to examining the impact of local intellectuals and political elites on the construction and cohesion of these communities.

The psychological process of Islamic radicalization involves a "change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup."[6] The aims of Muslim extremists stand in stark contrast to the intentions of nationalists. Historian George L. Mosse accurately describes national consciousness as "a secular religion, the people worshipping themselves."[7] The self-fulfilling popular will and cultural individualism of nationalism represents the antithesis of religious fundamentalism, which moralizes the submission of the people to a one true divine authority. However, clear distinctions between ethnic nationalism and Islamic radicalization often blur when comparing the motivations and strategies of these two movements. In his book *The Looming Tower*, Lawrence Wright explains most aptly how "radicalism usually prospers in the gap between rising expectations and declining opportunities."[8] Though their perceived grievances and end goals may vary, government oppression pushes both Muslim extremists and ethnic nationalists to exhibit radical behavior such as political violence and separatist resistance. Each group frequently uses propaganda and terrorism as tools to spread their message and oppose a common enemy. Religion is another common denominator, serving as a unifying ideological force for Muslim extremists or a source of cultural solidarity for ethnic nationalists. I consider this interplay between Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism to determine which trend incites the more forceful government response and appears more effective at appealing to minorities in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

After applying these foundational definitions to detailed news source analysis, I offer the following conclusions on the trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in the wake of the Kazan terrorist attacks as well as the government reaction to these developments. First, outside of a few isolated incidents, the religious communities of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan

appear relatively stable, not increasingly radicalizing to commit political violence against local spiritual leaders and the state. But the ever more forceful government response to secure the 2014 Sochi Olympics and potentially resurging Islamic terrorism following the NATO withdrawal from Central Asia threaten to alienate more Volga-Ural Muslim individuals. Second, though national separatist groups increased radical activity following the Kazan terrorist attacks, the regional governments of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan strategically manipulate ethnic nationalism to acquire greater autonomy from the federal center. Ultimately, the majority of Tatar and Bashkir society presently rejects the calls for religious extremism and national separatism across southwestern Russia.

CHAPTER 2: RELEVANT HISTORY

Tatarstan is located between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains in southwest Russia, maintaining close ties with its eastern neighbor, Bashkortostan. The primary ethnic minorities serve as the namesakes for the two autonomous republics. The Tatars and Bashkirs are Turkic peoples descended from the Volga Bulgars, who first arrived in the region in the 7th century, and other Turkic and Finnish nomadic tribes. The Bulgar State was established in the 9th century and adopted Islam in the 10th century.[9] As the Bulgar State developed, Mongol and Turkic warring parties gained power throughout Central Asia. One group in particular, the Tatars, earned great respect as fierce fighters and despite being nearly wiped out by the Mongols, their name lived on throughout history.[10]

Further west in the modern day territories of Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Hungary, myriad tribes of Slavic peoples settled along the great waterways of the region. According to the *Primary Chronicle*[11], compiled between 1037 and 1118, the Slavs invited the invading Varangians, also known as the Vikings and Russes, to mediate their decades old conflicts and establish order in the form of an empire. Prince Rurik and his claimed descendants consolidated pre-imperial Russia in the city of Novgorod in 862 A.D. that eventually extended southwest to the fortress of Kiev, culminating in the commonly termed kingdom of Ancient Rus. Through a series of peace treaties, Ancient Rus developed a close economic relationship with the Byzantine Empire whose Greek culture left a strong imprint on their society, particularly in matters of religion. Cyril and Methodius, two Byzantine missionaries, first traveled among the Slavs, spreading the tenets of Orthodoxy. Grand Prince Vladimir eventually adopted Christianity for the entire Russian kingdom in the 10th century, setting the precedent for strong relations between the church and state.

As their dominion expanded east to the Volga region, the Rus often faced attacks from Finnish and Turkic nomadic tribes as well as the Bulgars. It is significant to note that Orthodox Christianity in Ancient Rus and Sunni Islam in the Bulgar State both became established in the 10th century, serving as a key point of divergence between the two different cultures. In addition to periodic invasions, infighting between disputed successors at the death of each Grand Prince severely weakened the Russian state. Once the kingdom split into separate, autonomous principalities, the grand cities of Ancient Rus became markedly more vulnerable to foreign conquerors.[12]

In the early 13th century, Genghis Khan united the conflicting clans of Central Asia and invaded the lands of the Volga Bulgars and Ancient Rus. His successor Batu Khan continued the assault, decimating Ancient Rus with merciless physical destruction and hastening the fall of Kiev in 1240.[13] Two waves of the Mongol-Tatar invasion over these few decades greatly expanded the Golden Horde Empire and ushered in the period popularly referred to by the Rus as the "Mongol Yoke". With control over such vast new terrain, Mongols from Central Asia migrated north over the next centuries to the modern day territories of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, interspersing with the more native communities to become the "New Bulgars" of the region, ancestors of the present-day Tatars and Bashkirs.[14]

Despite being subjugated to an alien power, the early Russians still openly engaged in their traditional cultural practices, securing religious and later political autonomy through the consistent payment of tribute. The Great Khan passed a charter of immunity in 1267, which protected the Orthodox Church from taxes, military service, and seizure of property. Furthermore, the Mongol leader harshly decreed: "And anyone who would dare to blaspheme the Orthodox faith will be guilty of committing a crime and will be executed."[15] Such measured

leniency allowed the principality of Muscovy to gain strength economically and militarily and to develop a centralized, autocratic system to unify the Russian lands. The Muscovite victory at the Battle of Kulikovo Pole in 1380 marked the decline of Mongol control, which subsequently disintegrated into multiple warring factions including the Khanate of Kazan where the "New Bulgars" established dominion. In 1480 Ivan the Great (r. 1462-1505) finally dispelled Mongol influence from the Russian principalities.[16] Though effectively avoiding cultural integration into the Golden Horde Empire, many efficient policies transferred over into the new Russian State such as the tax system, military draft, and international trade routes.[17]

Consolidation of autocratic rule and massive territorial expansion marked the succeeding centuries. In 1547 Ivan the Terrible (r. 1533-1584) was granted the title of Tsar, elevating his status as Grand Prince of Muscovy to supreme ruler of all the Russian lands. His heirless son eventually hastened in the so-called Time of Troubles, a great power struggle between rival noble families out of which the Romanov dynasty ultimately prevailed to reign for the next three hundred years. Amidst this strengthening of the political structure, Ivan the Terrible waged vast military campaigns, notably annexing the Khanate of Kazan, the present-day autonomous republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Furthermore, he ordered the construction of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Kazan to symbolize his authority over the Muslim populations, initiating a period of religious persecution and extensive destruction of Islamic civilization.[18]

With the addition of larger swathes of land, the Muscovy solidified border security and increased economic development but also faced new challenges in ruling a multiethnic nation. Tsarist policies shifted back and forth between restricted political and religious toleration to forceful state and cultural homogenization of conquered peoples' institutions and customs. The government initially integrated native aristocracies including Tatar nobility, who could provide

specialized knowledge on their regions of past rule. In the 17th century, service records show only 1/3rd of officials identified as ethnically Russian with up to 17% claiming Tatar descent.[19] This suggests non-Russians still held some political sway in operations on the borders of the empire; however, their influence was soon diminished.

During his reign Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) introduced the Table of Ranks, requiring social standing by birth to be matched by exhibited competence. Most future nobles studied in Western Europe to meet the requirements, downgrading the position of non-Russian officials who lacked access to such opportunities.[20] Even those Tatar princes wealthy enough to secure such education still lost their land and serfs after the Christian faith became a prerequisite for ownership. Historian David M. Griffiths aptly explains it was "Peter's historic mission to return forcefully Russia to its pre-ordained European path, from which it had departed during the Mongol invasion."[21] With his strong intentions to "civilize" the border regions, Peter the Great instituted imperial decrees to convert non-Christian peoples such as the Tatars and Bashkirs to Orthodoxy. Over 400,000 non-Russians were baptized and hundreds of mosques destroyed during the first half of the 18th century.[22] State officials often offered material incentives for peaceful conversion, but pockets of resistance in multiethnic populations regularly appeared to challenge tsarist forces.

Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796) reversed many of these policies, instead utilizing religious toleration as a tool of state control. Various ecclesiastical reforms fueled the development of Islamic institutions and widespread construction of mosques and madrassas. In 1789 the Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Muhammaden Creed was founded in Ufa to serve as a center for spiritual authority and political directives over the Muslim populations. The moderate Hanafi school of religious thought became the ideological foundation for most Islamic

institutions in the Russian Empire. Doctrinal disputes often arose between officially licensed clerics and traditional theologians trained abroad. Laypeople eventually used state structures to enforce Sharia law and even extolled the imperial family during Friday prayers in the mosque.[23] Ultimately, the autocratic regime became a patron of Sunni Islam to maintain the empire and further territorial expansion, winning the hearts and minds of local elites as a gateway to economic prosperity in Central Asia.

In his analysis of Russia in the 19th century, historian Paul W. Werth argues tsarist policies shifted from tolerance of different cultures in exchange for general allegiance to a higher degree of cultural integration into one unitary national state. Government officials, following the conventions established under Catherine the Great, granted special privileges to ethnic minorities acting as critical intermediaries for state-building in the border regions. Tatars enjoyed access to higher education and formed a substantial merchant class while Bashkirs received tax and military exemptions and property rights until 1863.[24] But religious policies under Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) and Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) reestablished the predominance of Orthodoxy for the entire Russian empire, signaling a decline in social status for Muslim populations. Fears also swirled regarding the more fanatical tenets of Sunni Islam as Imam Shamil ignited a decades-long resistance movement in the North Caucasus. Such concerns prompted a revitalization of missionary work, doctrinal standardization of all tolerated faiths, and bans on the hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca, in order to limit the spread of more radical beliefs from foreign spiritual centers.[25]

Amidst a wave of growing nationalist movements across Europe in the mid-19th century, Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855-1881) emancipated the serfs and offered new political and judicial liberties which propelled the government to identify even more closely with ethnic Russians of

Christian faith. The reforms notably excluded changes in religious policy. The waves of apostasy, particularly by baptized Tatars, and negative opinions of the Anti-Muslim Missionary Division meant state and church officials "increasingly came to regard Muslims in the region as intractably alien, unassimilable, and ultimately hostile to Christianity and the Russian State."[26] Many non-Russians, still loyal to the tsar but frustrated with the church, submitted petitions for Muslim status and equal rights, uniting in a form of passive resistance against Russification. However, these requests fell on deaf ears as new forms of taxation, military conscription, and Russian language laws entered into power.[27]

In this oppressive society of heavy police surveillance, the laypeople periodically triggered sudden revolts from fear of forced conversion and anger over imperial decrees of discrimination. The widespread missionary education approach of Nikolai Il'minskii, who believed in Christian schooling through non-Russian languages, particularly threatened the cultural integrity of Islamic communities. These attempts at proselytizing also contributed to the initial formation of national identities in the Volga-Ural region as Tatars and Bashkirs acquired more access to instruction in their native tongues.[28] More radical sects such as the God's Regiment of Muslim Old Believers incited conflict against local authorities; however, most Muslims did not resort to violence but continued to express their frustrations through the state system of Islamic institutions.[29] Particularly, the Jadid reform movement emphasized the compatibility of Islam with modernist ideas such as nationalism, democracy, and rationality. Such increasing civic involvement resulted in some concessions for Muslim populations in the Revolution of 1905. The political activism of ethnic minorities intensified as non-Russian leaders called for political, economic, and social reforms near the end of the Romanov dynasty.

During the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and subsequent Russian Civil War, communist revolutionary leaders Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin determined that they needed to appease the non-Russian populations to quell their frustration with past tsarist tyranny and reassert control over the territories of the former Russian empire. The birth of the republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan in 1919-1920 serves as a relevant case study. The Bashkirs, who felt threatened by the growing Tatar influence in the Volga-Ural region, agreed to provide military support for the Bolshevik cause in exchange for an autonomous territory. Having struggled and failed to assimilate the uncooperative Bashkirs into a unified Tatar Muslim entity, Tatar intellectuals expressed enough outrage over the arrangement to secure their own republic. The brief spell of Bolshevik-Bashkir collaboration failed miserably as prejudiced Red Army units atrociously persecuted Bashkir soldiers and Bashkir leaders ambitiously stretched the limits of improvised Soviet autonomy.[30] Lenin and Stalin recentralized power over the local governments in the Volga-Ural region, needing to further formulate their nationalities policy.

Following the social upheaval of the Soviet experiment in Bashkortostan, Lenin more thoroughly studied the mobilizing force of nationalism, envisioning his great Soviet Russia as "a future multinationalist socialist edifice."[31] His 1923 resolutions as premier granted limited autonomy to thousands of national territories including the lands of the Tatars and Bashkirs. Lenin believed this policy would "guide national movements beyond bourgeois primordial nationalism to Soviet international nationalism."[32] This process of nativization, institutionalizing ethnicity into the state apparatus, aimed to promote equality between all peoples under one harmonious socialist system; however, granting official identity to various ethnic groups also clashed with the push for assimilation into a common Soviet culture.[33] His ideological hope, an irreconcilable paradox, was for a singular Soviet character to eventually transcend all the

nationalist peculiarities of the ethnic minorities. Once given the opportunity to define themselves, the Tatars and Bashkirs like others began reviving their cultures, not seeking to integrate into the communist regime.

Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, revised the implementation of these nationality policies, declaring the greatest threat resides in the "nationalism that one has forgotten to combat."[34] He continued to glorify the image of the Soviet worker through socialist and atheistic propaganda but with more emphasis on the superiority of Russian nationality, deepening the contradictions ultimately detrimental to Communist control.[35] Stalin initiated antireligious campaigns and violent industrialization in a push for social homogenization that terrorized the culture and livelihood of non-Russian peoples. During his rule, tens of thousands of Muslim clerics, deemed "parasites of society," lost their positions with the closure of over 24,000 mosques.[36] The collectivization of agriculture, massive famines, and forcible migration left millions dead across the Soviet Union.[37] Such catastrophic policies reignited the frustration in the hearts and minds of the non-Russian peoples, fueling solidarity in the community and a call for action. By the 1960s, "most of the republics had become more national in character, not only demographically, but politically and culturally,"[38] demonstrating persistence of the principles in Lenin's nationality policy and consolidating effects of Stalin's repressive regime.

Nationalist movements arose to challenge the Soviet regime through political activism in the 1970s and 1980s. The grassroots practice of *samizdat* was a key form of dissident activity across the Soviet bloc in which individuals reproduced censored publications by hand and passed the documents from reader to reader.[39] Many of these documents were appeals crafted by the Tatar and Bashkir peoples. In the "Appeal to the 23rd Party Congress," the authors scrutinized the policy of forced cultural homogenization, citing from 1944 to 1966 only 10 titles were

published in the Tatar language in comparison to 218 titles in the year 1940 alone.[40] Such a trend explains why 70% of the non-Russian population in the region was illiterate in their own language.[41] A petition to the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations highlighted the "unequal opportunities offered to members of different ethnic groups in the Tatar and Bashkir Autonomous Republics."[42] More details were provided in the "Appeal to Non-Russian Nationalities," describing various examples of economic discrimination such as the price of meat rising by 250% in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.[43] Their demands gained little traction with General Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev, pushing nationalists to find other alternatives.

Ethnic nationalism, resulting from the paradoxical Soviet nationalities policy, a lack of viable economic opportunities, and status of inferiority for ethnic minorities, coincided with a call to arms in the form of Islamic militancy throughout Central Asia and Muslim-dominated republics of Russia. By so explicitly assaulting religion, the "Soviets had reduced Islam to the legal status of a cult."[44] However, underground mosques and madrassas kept Islam alive clandestinely and provided forums for Muslim intellectuals. As a consequence of the Communist attack on Islamic education, these scholars often traveled abroad as well, adopting revivalist beliefs of the more extremist Wahhabi-Salafi school that influenced the rise of Islamic militancy in the Soviet Union.[45] The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), founded by a group of Tatar academicians, "sought to organize Muslims within the Soviet Union to campaign for the introduction of sharia (Islamic law) to Russia."[46] Hardliners of the IRP often cracked down on moderate reformists for hindering the push for rapid change.

The Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HT) particularly antagonized more radical movements and the suspicious centralized government. Founded in 1953, this once highly

secretive, pan-Islamic movement wields wide social influence in dozens of countries today, marketing their ideology through the effective use of media technology. The organization "cleverly uses the history and message of early Islam as a revolutionary call to arms for the modern era."[47] However, HT does not believe in violently overthrowing the government but in actively and peacefully building mass support from the people to establish an Islamic state. Arrest records of suspected militants carrying related literature on this cause confirms the spread of HT throughout Central Asia and into the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.[48] Muslim scholars in HT created a doctrine that served as adequate intellectual justifications for impatient youth to seek out rapid change in order to alleviate their perceived grievances.

Significantly, Russian Muslims started interacting more with extremists abroad when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. From 1982 to 1992, over 35,000 Muslims radicalized from 43 Islamic countries to fight for the mujahedeen.[49] Young Russian Muslim men studied and battled abroad, eventually returning with a more extremist interpretation of Islam from such countries as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The influx of radical militants, hardened veterans of the Soviet War in Afghanistan, created a variety of difficult internal security situations for Russia, especially in the Caucasus region.

During the years leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Communist reformer Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to revive the nationality policy of Lenin, restoring lost rights to the Tatars and Bashkirs, but the empire was crumbling beneath his feet. Prominent historian Ronald Grigor Suny insightfully concludes concerning ethnic nationalism during the Soviet Union: "a state that had set out to overcome nationalism and the difference between nations had in fact created a set of institutions and initiated processes that fostered the development of conscious, secular, politically mobilizable nationalities."[50] Islam was used as a "unifying cultural symbol"[51]

and also politicized to foment religious extremism, revealing the overlap and distinction between ethnic nationalism and Islamic radicalization.

The Tatars and Bashkirs represent two of the most influential of these Muslim nationalities; thus, their demands became reality in the formation of the Russian Federation. The first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, even proclaimed to the republics of the crumbling Soviet Union, "take as much sovereignty as you can swallow."[52] The Treaty of 1994 ensures the republics deemed autonomous including Tatarstan and Bashkortostan have the rights to craft their own constitution, institute their own state languages, and establish economic ties with foreign nations.[53] Amidst the chaos of the failing Soviet Union, the leaders of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan seized a key opportunity for political power. They rejected secession in order to utilize the Russian superstructure while being essentially independent and keeping 100% of local revenues.[54] Notably, other ethnic minorities were not allotted similar latitude.

Though President Yeltsin only offered various levels of limited sovereignty, the republic of Chechnya demanded the right of self-determination and called for independence. The ensuing conflict prompted the First Chechen War (1994-1996) with international sources citing casualty numbers of more than 80,000 civilians and soldiers.[55] Amidst a shaky truce, the interwar period saw a different instigator than the nationalism that fueled the first hostilities. Visiting al Qaeda leaders introduced a different kind of fundamentalist Islam that called for violent jihad in order to establish a country based on Sharia law.[56] The upsurge in extremist activity and the lack of governmental control in the region ultimately triggered the Second Chechen War (1999-2009). The Russian government specifically cited the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings that killed over 300 people as justification for their invasions into Dagestan and Chechnya.[57] An extensive counterinsurgency campaign culminated in more Russian security personnel killed than US

forces in Iraq and Afghanistan during 2008 and 2009.[58] In addition to various successful and attempted terrorist attacks across Russia such as the 2011 Domodedovo International Airport bombing, violent hostilities and human rights abuses continue to plague the republics of the North Caucasus. The important political, economic, and social trends presented in this historical analysis inform the situation in the modern day.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Presently, the regions of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are not heavily studied in most academic circles, but there is an increasing amount of relevant research to be reviewed. General population and limited economic data is easily accessible on the area. According to the 2010 census, an estimated 3,786,400 people live in Tatarstan. Tatars and Russians represent about 53.2% and 39.7% of the population respectively. Out of 173 ethnic groups in the republic, 8 ethnic groups including the Bashkirs have over 10,000 members. Large communities of Tatars reside across Russia, particularly in Bashkortostan, and Central Asia as well. Oil ranks as the primary industry in Tatarstan with estimated reserves of 1 billion tons.[59] Comparatively, according to the same 2010 census, an estimated 4,065,993 people live in Bashkortostan. About a third of the population are Bashkirs of over 100 nationalities residing in the republic. Bashkortostan leads the region in chemical processing with plants stationed across the territory.[60]

In his article "Russia and Tatarstan: At a Crossroads of History"[61] published in 2000, Raphael Khakimov, Director of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan, provides a detailed analysis of the morphing relationship between the autonomous republic of Tatarstan and the Russian Federation a decade after the fall of the Soviet Union. He begins with the brief mentioning of a key visit by Mintimer Shaimiev, President of Tatarstan, at a Harvard forum in 1994. From this academic environment, the term "the Tatarstan model" was born and gained international recognition. Tatarstan embodies "an attempt to find peaceful ways of development in such a supermilitarized country" even with the longstanding historical dispute between Kazan and Moscow. Furthermore, Khakimov claims, "social tension is clearly weakening in the republic from year to year." This assessment usefully relates to the current

situation in examining the possible growth of social tension from perceived political and religious grievances of the Tatars and Bashkirs.

Khakimov addresses the underlying identity issue that may be developing in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan today more rapidly in the form of activism and violence when he posits, "if the indigenous people of Rossiia often appear more ancient than the Russians, then from whom exactly should one begin a description of the history of Rossiia?" The answer to this question remains unclear, serving as one point of justification for the demands of ethnic minorities in Russia. During this post-Soviet period, "Islamic and Turkic influence on Tatarstan and other republics has intensified" while the Russians called for a renaissance of their own culture. Such nationalist movements represent the traditional social processes of two different civilizations: Orthodoxy and Islam. Despite the dissimilarities, Khakimov tends to use a cautiously optimistic tone in discussing political cooperation between Kazan and Moscow. Furthermore, he cites the importance of Islamic reformism in recent history, which "permits traditional Tatar and Islamic values to be organically united with the ideas of liberalism and democracy." Ultimately, this opinion piece presents the different models of development progressing in Russia and Tatarstan, acting as an important landmark for comparison with later events.

As revealed in another work titled "Opportunities and Limits of Self-Creation and Identity Politics: Tatarstan's Paradiplomatic Project"[62] by Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, the aforementioned article author, Raphael Khakimov, served in an additional role as a state advisor to the President. It is important to note his position in considering the likely politicization of his ideas. Sharafutdinova uses Tatarstan as a case study to examine "paradiplomacy" in Russia, defined as "international activities of governments on the sub national level."[63] Through the scope of the constructivist approach, which "perceives identities as a result of "construction" that

is usually done by the elites, both political and cultural,"[64] her findings coincide with the models of development cited by Khakimov.

Just as President Shaimiev's visit to the Harvard forum received international recognition, Tatarstan further sought to construct a sovereign state identity in the global community through relations with foreign nations. The government of Tatarstan signed 14 agreements with sovereign states and developed connections with the United Nations and League of Arab States. Though often economic and cultural on the surface, agreements of friendship and cooperation with republics such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Abkhazia harbored underlying political ramifications challenging Russian policy in the region. In a more overt challenge to federal authority, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Ingushetia all publicly criticized the Russian course of action in the Kosovo crisis of 1999, forbidding their military units from serving in the area.[65] These diplomatic moves suggest autonomous republics in Russia enjoyed a period of great political flexibility during the last decade of the 20th century.

Tatar leaders also established close economic ties in Western nations and Muslim-Turkic countries. Partnerships with the United States and France revolved around the competitive industries of oil and petrochemical products, leading to the creation of diplomatic trade missions on both sides. Relationships with the Middle East spanned deeper. Linked by culture and religion, the governments of Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan treated the President of Tatarstan as head of a sovereign state during official visits. Items produced domestically in Tatarstan such as trucks, helicopters, and defense related equipment also became economically viable, proving to be quite competitive in Middle Eastern markets.[66] Despite actively projecting the image of a sovereign state throughout the international community, Tatar officials lost the political mobility for such maneuvers with the arrival of President Vladimir Putin.

On entering office in 2000, Putin divided Russia into seven federal districts and dispatched presidential envoys with the full weight of the law to lead a standardization campaign. This project of recentralization aimed to harmonize the violations of the power-sharing treaties negotiated by Yeltsin in the 1990s with federal law. In his article "Resisting Putin's Federal Reforms on the Legal Front,"[67] Robert Sharlet cites Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as the "two most consistent resisters of Russian authority."[68] He argues, "revising local laws did not usually arouse ethnic national passions or regional chauvinism"[69] because newly installed democratic processes in the republican districts allowed all interested parties to participate in the revision process. However, reconciling the republics' constitutions with federal standards proved much more difficult since the "growth of nationalism and separatism in the republics…inevitably found its expression in legislation [and], most of all the republics' constitutions."[70] At the time of the publication of this article in 2003, Sharlet claims Tatarstan and Bashkortostan successfully resisted Putin's push for recentralization with only minor concessions on the legal front. Clever political strategizing such as exploiting Russian concerns with religious fundamentalism helped in these efforts.

Having published a few years later, Sharafutdinova reaches a different conclusion on the successes of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan amidst increasing authoritarian governance. She attests that new federal laws on the tax system, political parties, and local legislatures ensure federal control in the regions and limit the symbolic nature of paradiplomacy for the republics. Sharafutdinova argues a domestic political regime defines what a region is during times of stability, while periods of chaos allow more influence from foreign external pressures. Thus, as a result of Putin's policies, "sub-national involvement in international policy-making does not pose a threat of disintegration for Russia."[71] Secession appears unlikely since the loss of regional

authority hurts the perception of legitimate sovereignty for Tatarstan and Bashkortostan on the world stage.

In his article "Revisiting Sovereign Tatarstan,"[72] Matthew Derrick also agrees that Putin has dismantled the autonomy of Tatarstan and other regions, claiming Tatar leaders promoted "the institutions, practice, and discourses that are designed to legitimate a particular conception of a state,"[73] but lost political ground to increasing federal authority. In contrast to Sharafutdinova, he places his assessment in the context of Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's sovereign statehood in 2008, implying the potential for a similar movement in Tatarstan. Derrick includes a quote from a Kazan-based opposition newspaper supporting this suggestion: "For the first time Russia has recognized former autonomous republics as independent. Tatar society has been moved to action. A certain psychological barrier has been overcome."[74] In the wake of the blitz for sovereignty during the 1990s, Putin systematically stripped the paradiplomatic projects and territorial autonomy of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in his push for centralization, creating an environment for potential dissension. This research partially aims to examine whether nationalist fervor is increasing as Putin continues to pass policies limiting the political freedoms of ethnic minorities in these republics.

Tracking the trend of Islamic radicalization in conjunction with or as an alternative to ethnic nationalism represents another topic of interest for this research. In his 2007 paper "The Potential of Radical Islam in Tatarstan,"[75] Eduard Ponarin gives an insightful glimpse into the "frail balance between local religious and nationalist activists, the local government, and the federal center."[76] He provides a strikingly different analysis of the post-Soviet period in claiming that Tatarstan was one of the least democratic republics in Russia by the end of the 20th century. He cites the authoritarian policies of President Shaimiev who forcefully established one religious

authority in Tatarstan, promoted closer relations with Moscow on domestic security operations, and limited Muslim opposition leaders in local elections. Consequently, rival religious organizations exiled from Tatarstan still exist in Bashkortostan today, fueling tensions with state-backed spiritual leaders across the Volga-Ural region.[77]

Ponarin draws his conclusions from interviews with imams and Islamic students in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Their opinions reveal the effects of the religious schism that occurred in the 1990s. The majority thinks negatively on the politicization of Islam but believes Muslim authorities should be politically involved at least locally. Younger individuals even explained that Islam and politics operate side by side. Notably, some commented that poorer mosques receive financial support from Saudi Arabia, which often leads to the spread of Wahhabi-Salafi tenets, a more conservative and frequently radical interpretation of Islam. Following a 2003 gas pipeline explosion, allegedly caused by students from a madrassa in Bashkortostan, leaders in Tatarstan worked with Moscow more willingly to crack down on Islamic extremists, often resulting in indiscriminate arrests.[78] Ponarin argues a combination of these issues suggests "a union of radicalized nationalists in opposition and religious opposition is an emerging reality."[79] Such collaboration is an important trend to examine in the present situation.

In their latest "Islam, Islamism and Politics in Eurasia Report,"[80] the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) assesses that "domestic political factors and the influence of and infiltration by the global jihadi and Salafist revolutionary movements"[81] are fueling the spread of jihadi terrorism to Tatarstan. CSIS cites the Kazan terrorist attacks in July as a primary example of this development. Allegedly, the government of Tatarstan originally selected Mufti Faizov to weed out mullahs sympathetic to radical Islam, which explains the assassination

attempt on his life. Another potential terrorist attack was thwarted by human error when four suspected radical Islamists were killed when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) exploded in their car on August 20th. More alarmingly, CSIS reports the first cases of cooperation between Tatarstan radicalists and Caucasus jihadists. During their video claiming responsibility for the aforementioned incident, the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan pledged their loyalty to the head of the Caucasus Emirate. Rebel leaders in the Caucasus region had been calling to set up Volga and Ural fronts for jihad as early as 2004. Similar messages of encouragement appeared from al-Qaeda through Bulgar Jamaat, a terrorist group of ethnic Tatars who fled to Pakistan, calling for jihad against Russia. CSIS certainly gives an in depth look at specific cases suggesting the increase of political violence across the Volga-Ural region.

The February 2013 report "Islamist Militant Threats to Eurasia"[82] presented by Jacob Zenn of the Jamestown Foundation to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs proactively addresses such national security issues. Resulting from the invasion of Afghanistan, Zenn explains Central Asian Islamist militants now "harbor a hatred of the United States after fighting against the United States since 2001."[83] Particularly, a group called Jund al-Khilafa, formed by three Kazakhs in 2011, have launched attacks throughout Central Asia and dispatched cells to the North Caucasus. Though banned in Russia in 2003, Hizb ut Tahrir (HuT) has reemerged with an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 members. Zenn emphasizes "many Islamists first join Salafist groups like HuT before moving onto Salafist-Jihadist militant groups."[84] Most significantly is the following note included in the report:

> Although it is beyond the scope of the discussion today, it is important to mention that the Caucasus Emirate is seeking to expand its financial and operational networks from the North Caucasus to the Russian Volga and Ural regions and Tatarstan and

> Bashkortostan. There has been a steady rise of Salafism in those regions in recent years with many HuT cells broken up. New militant groups also have formed which target imams who do not support a strict interpretation of Sharia Law.[85]

As depicted here, the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan appear to be receiving more attention domestically from security professionals and political leaders in recent years. Such interest provides further impetus for pursuing this research.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, few scholars have studied political violence and territorial autonomy in the Volga-Ural region of the Russian Federation. Many of the aforementioned authors present opinions that seemingly contradict each other when reviewed side by side. However, the complexity of these topics demands such intellectual conflict. Despite the wide range of claims, certain constants connect the various arguments. The continually morphing relationships between local religious institutions, regional governments, and the federal center often impact the growth of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. These shifts frequently coincide with the push for stronger autonomy, identity formation, and periodic armed resistance. Specific case studies also emphasize the expanding ties between religious extremists and ethnic nationalists in the Volga-Ural region and potential threats to Russian internal security from transnational terrorist groups. Informed by this contemporary literature review, the proceeding chapters further explore the current trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to these developments.

CHAPTER 4: PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

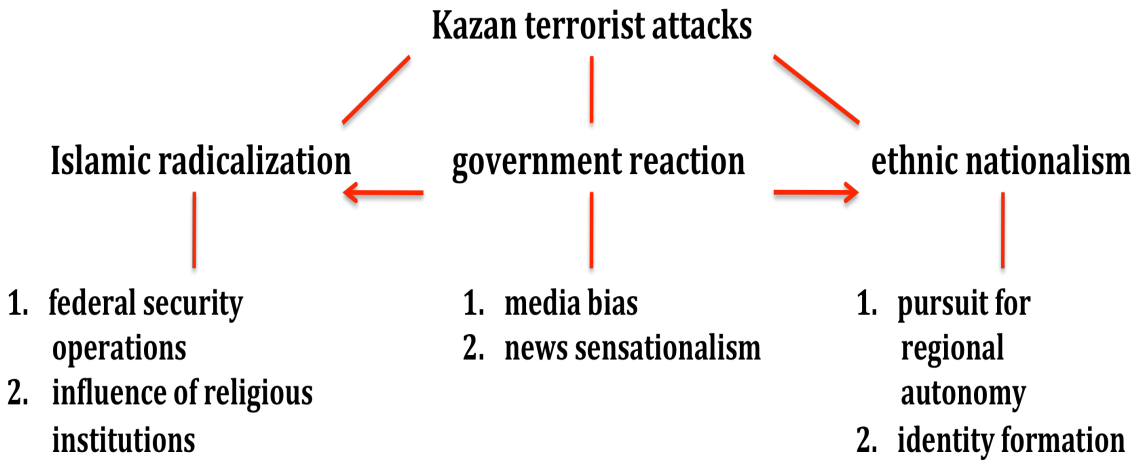
In order to most objectively assess these trends in the present, I have selected a less common but certainly rigorous method of qualitative research known as Constant Comparative Content Analysis. Sociologist Barney G. Glaser outlines his concerns with Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) and offers useful modifications to Grounded Theory (GT), the category in which this methodology falls, in his article "Remodeling Grounded Theory."[86] Glaser defines GT as "a set of integrated conceptual hypotheses systematically generated to produce an inductive theory about a substantive area." He overly criticizes QDA, burdened with the need for achieving accuracy, believing it better to "begin with no preconceived theory and then generate one during the analysis." I have modified this model at my discretion to best serve my purposes in this research, cutting the more draconian directives in GT; however, I still readily apply the fundamental tenets of this theory such as to "maintain analytical distance" and "develop theoretical insight." These techniques help ensure a more objective approach to the topics of interest.

Constant Comparative Content Analysis begins with a form of regular daily data collecting so that "all data are constantly compared to generate concepts." Unintentionally at first as a result of simple curiosity, I compiled a set of useful data by following English and Russian language articles both closely and remotely related to the Kazan terrorist attacks in July 2012. Notably, Glaser explains the "criteria for establishing the core variable within a GT are that it is central, relating to as many other categories and their properties as possible and accounting for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of behavior." The Kazan terrorist attacks embody the core variable for this research. The key concepts associated with this act of political violence are the trends of ethnic nationalism, Islamic radicalization, and government

reaction to a potential increase in extremism. With an established initial theoretical package, the next component of GT is developing core categories that connect to the core variable.

This honors thesis addresses four core categories relevant to the autonomous republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan: federal security operations, influence of religious institutions, pursuit for regional autonomy, and identity formation. I review various original Russian media sources in order to compare and contrast the key concepts across these core categories. The conclusions drawn from each core category inform the diverse impact of the core variable on the target areas. Thus, the various effects of the Kazan terrorist attacks serve as an effective testing ground to explore the current dynamics of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to these developments. Naturally, in conducting detailed news source analysis, bias represents a potential confounding factor. The following discussion briefly addresses the extent of current government interference and news sensationalism in the Russian media and how this study intends to evaluate such bias in order to derive more thorough conclusions on the topics of interest.

FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM OF METHODOLOGY



After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian media outlets enjoyed a brief period of press freedom markedly different from the past decades of strict government censorship. Notable broadcasting and print companies such as *NTV* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* launched in the 1990s, leading the way for post-communist media independence and Western liberalism. But the rushed introduction of capitalism to the market and shaky political structure of the federation resulted in rampant corruption, economic decline, and a disastrous war in Chechnya. By the turn of the millennium, the Russian people readily approved of President Vladimir Putin whose authoritarian policies provided the appearance of stability; however, his arrival ended the earlier movement for an open and free civil society. To recentralize political and economic control, President Putin challenged the business oligarchs who secured the majority of their assets during the privatization of Russia. The federal government seized their holdings, many of which included media outlets, and either integrated these companies into their own apparatus as in the Gazprom takeover of *NTV* or transferred ownership to loyal managers. Such legal action reinstituted widespread government interference in the Russian media.

In her article "Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia,"[87] Maria Lipman categorizes the government-controlled media sources influential on the Russian populace today:

> The first is the largest mass-audience media, especially national TV channels, which reach almost 100 per cent of Russian households. The three major national channels are used as tools of state propaganda in a way that is increasingly reminiscent of the Soviet days. The second category includes a variety of smaller-audience outlets – print, radio, websites and smaller TV stations. This category is of less interest for the ruling elite as a political resource, but all the Russian media operate on the understanding that loyalty to the state is the order of the day.[88]

Significantly, television functions as the primary medium of political manipulation while other modes of communication also present opinions loyal to the government. Lipman elaborates on the state strategy for control of the press, citing a 2008 Russian Newsweek article that exposed weekly high-level meetings between Kremlin officials and top TV directors to craft the news agenda for each week. Despite these preconceived headlines, Russia tolerates some opposition news outlets to appease the intelligentsia and to manufacture a more favorable image for the international community. Such leniency has shown to be limited in cases when media-driven investigations particularly threaten the government. Though speculation abounds, most suspect the state sponsored the assassinations of *Novaya Gazeta* journalists, Anna Politkovskaya and Yury Shchekochikhin. These incidents fuel the phenomenon of self-censorship in the Russian media.[89]

Though journalists, fearful of retribution, often censor their articles, an unexpected newsworthy event may create difficulties for developing opinions in line with the government. In his study "Quantifying Polarisation in Media Coverage,"[90] Rolf Fredheim demonstrates how the unanticipated 2011-12 protests over the presidential elections polarized the mainstream media in Russia. He tracks pronoun usage in various Russian newspapers to measure the emotional engagement and persuasive nature of the more radical language in each article on the protests. His results show during which months the government strongly intervened to incorporate stronger anti-opposition rhetoric into the news. Such research gives a clear example of how the federal government may blatantly interfere in the Russian print media today as a consequence of a largely unforeseen and politically threatening situation.

Amidst the government-manipulated bias in the Russian media, news outlets also have a natural tendency to sensationalize the facts, dangerously morphing public opinion on certain

issues. In his series "Window on Eurasia,"[91] Paul Goble, a senior analyst at the Jamestown Foundation, cites a recent interview conducted by *Islam News*[92] with the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI), which is "a frequent source of anti-Muslim commentaries in the Russian media." RISI scholar Azhdar Kurtov claims that journalists sensationalize the threat of Islam to attract more readers, consequently "creating the very sensations that they have incorrectly reported." Though their policies impact the headlines, he argues the government generally does not direct anti-Muslim rhetoric in the news. But Goble assesses that since the state-influenced RISI also regularly promotes hysteria in the media, Kurtov's comments may aim to "deflect responsibility" from the government onto journalists for the negative press against Islam. These opposing viewpoints show how news sensationalism and government interference play an interconnected role in biasing the Russian media.

With the preceding comments in mind, I decided to review both Russian broadcasting and print news sources because they are the two most popular and most politically manipulated mediums in recent years. After appraising dozens of news reports in various media outlets through weekly data collection and online archival research, I chose 16 news articles and television broadcasts to be analyzed in the following two chapters. Preceding the analysis of each news article, I briefly discuss the ownership history and paper circulation to present the specific bias and societal influence of that print media source. The television broadcasts come from two of the three most viewed and state-controlled national channels. Sharing this context further clarifies the deductions drawn from each news outlet.

Variety of opinion and clearest relevance to the core categories informed the final selection of the media sources. During the stage of media source collection, I discovered certain core categories more readily reflect the dynamics of specific key concepts, prompting the

subsequent organization of analysis. The first research chapter examines the key concept of Islamic radicalization through the core categories of federal security operations and influence of religious institutions. The second research chapter focuses on ethnic nationalism through the scope of pursuit for regional autonomy and identity formation. Inferences on the government reaction to a potential rise in extremism permeate both discussions.

Ultimately, since the media often serves as a powerful tool for mobilizing the masses, comparing the conflicting presentations of frequently sensationalized facts in the news proves useful to correctly interpreting the effects of the Kazan terrorist attacks. Furthermore, state interference in the media provides particular insights into the government stance on the situation and the subsequent impact of that bias on the populace. Through Constant Comparative Content Analysis of news sources, I intend to uncover accurate information on the trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to these developments.

CHAPTER 5: STRONG FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REACTION TO THREAT OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

The psychological process of Islamic radicalization involves a "change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup."[93] This foundational definition serves as the litmus test for assessing the trend of Islamic radicalization in the Volga-Ural region. In the wake of the Kazan terrorist attacks, the Russian federal government reacted strongly to the seemingly increasing threat of religious extremism. Through Constant Comparative Content Analysis, the following compilation of media sources demonstrates the impact of two core categories, federal security operations and religious institutions, on the possible spread of radical Islam in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Ultimately, outside of a few isolated incidents, the religious communities of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan appear relatively stable, not increasingly radicalizing to commit political violence against local spiritual leaders and the state. But the ever more forceful government response to secure the 2014 Sochi Olympics and resurging Islamic terrorism following the NATO withdrawal from Central Asia threaten to alienate more Muslim individuals in the Volga-Ural region.

In the few weeks following the Kazan terrorist attacks, the state-controlled Russian language news channel *NTV* broadcasted several speculative reports on the suspected perpetrators of the car bombing and fatal shooting. A broadcast headlined "Mufti of Tatarstan Crossed Path of Hajj-Operator"[94] on 20 July 2012 describes the arrest of five suspects with business connections to a company called Idel-Hajj, which organizes the hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca, for the local Muslim community. The report initially identifies the conflict with radical Islam and battle for control of the hajj as the primary motivators for the incident. The next

several comments detail how Mufti Ildus Faizov, who survived the assassination attempt, instituted a quota on the number of Muslims permitted to travel to Mecca in order to control the Islamic radicalization of groups abroad. Such restrictions as well as a rise in the price of the hajj displeased many community members. The report even considerately mentions how most Muslims save money their whole life to participate in the pilgrimage. By critically reviewing recent religious policy changes, the government-influenced broadcast seems to almost justify the terrorist activity, depicting the incident as an isolated act of excused intra-communal violence and not as the harbinger of radical Islam to Tatarstan. Ironically, the federal center likely compelled Mufti Faizov to institute these modifications in the first place but still wants to uphold the image of good working relations with Muslim populations after the Kazan terrorist attacks.

Another *NTV* news clip headlined "Mujahedeen of Tatarstan Admitted Attacks on Mufti"[95] on 8 August 2012 analyzes two videos in which a previously unheard of radical Islamic organization called the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan claims responsibility for the assassinations in July. The report provides various details on the dress and arms of the militants as well as quotes of more radical rhetoric from the group such as "I think that the operation was successful, and we will carry out further acts against the enemies of Allah." Notably, a discussion on the allegiance of the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan to North Caucasus militant leader Doku Umarov of the Caucasus Emirate also unfolds in the broadcast. This new development undermines the conjecture of the previous report, suggesting a larger problem with Islamic radicalization stemming from the North Caucasus exists in the Volga-Ural region. Assuming state interference in *NTV*, the shift in bias shows how the Russian government initially preferred to depict the incident as a singular intra-communal financial issue; however, the involvement of the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan necessitated wider recognition of the potentially growing threat of Muslim extremism.

The English language regional newspaper *The Kazan Herald* provides a more balanced view of the July incident. *The Kazan Herald* is Tatarstan's first and only English language newspaper founded in May 2010 and is owned by the independent The Kazan Herald Publishing Company. It distributes a monthly print version free-of-charge around Kazan and other cities and regularly updates a website.[96] The opinions expressed in *The Kazan Herald* likely appear more nuanced and objective than the Russian national newspapers and television channels.

On 24 August 2012, Mark Galeotti, a professor at New York University, published an article titled "The Jihad is Not on the March,"[97] sharing a healthy skepticism of the supposed link between the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan and the Caucasus Emirate, a militant network banned in Russia and on the U.S. List of Most Wanted Terrorist Organizations. He mentions alternative explanations exist for the targeted assassinations of the Mufti and his deputy. As reported by *NTV*, another driving factor is the change for the hajj to a different tour provider under the control of the Tatarstan Spiritual Board of Muslims. Galeotti further suggests the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan claimed responsibility for the attacks conspicuously late. Though not verified by a documented source, he attests that only 3,000 Tatars follow the extreme Salafist form of Islam with only a small minority endorsing terrorism.

This article primarily addresses the attempts of the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan and Caucasus Emirate to bolster their combined identity as an imagined community, waging jihad against Russia in a coordinated fashion. Unlike the second *NTV* report, Galeotti undermines such a claim in describing the insurgencies of the North Caucasus to be "a constellation of largely autonomous local and republican groups" who engage in "opportunistic and small-scale" attacks. Furthermore, he emphasizes the Russian government has "shown a tendency to over-react when it feels its authority and power are in question." The local interior minister even

claimed they have been fighting "an undeclared war" in the region for the last thirteen years. These "recruiting sergeants for the jihad" instigate the harsh crackdowns of the Russian government that give recognition to the constructed reality of an interconnected radical Salafist community in Russia. This tendency for overreaction may unintentionally contribute to the growth of Islamic radicalization as extremist leaders effectively exploit the brutality of the government to further justify violent jihad against the state.

The Russian language national newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* presents additional evidence of policies against religious fundamentalism similarly described in *The Kazan Herald* article and *NTV* report. With a small circulation of 40,000 papers out of Moscow, the publication mainly targets politicians, businessmen, and academics. It was founded in 1990 and expanded under the ownership of exiled oligarch, Boris Berezovsky. In August 2005, Konstantin Remchukov, a former Russian government advisor, purchased the paper then appointed himself editor-in-chief in February 2007. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* maintains a reputation as prominent and prestigious in the Russian media and offers a forum for opinions more critical of the Russian government.[98]

Nezavisimaya Gazeta published an article titled "Mufti of Tatarstan Laid Out Credentials"[99] on 3 March 2013 announcing the new Mufti of Tatarstan. The second half of the text focuses on the past leadership of Mufti Faizov before the Kazan terrorist attacks. Mufti Faizov became head of the Muslim community in Tatarstan in April 2011. He immediately initiated an "unprecedented campaign of purification" to rid the religious establishment of radical Islam. All Tatar imams needed to attend training courses condemning extremist ideas and emphasizing the traditional Hanafi school, a long-standing theory of religious thought in the Volga-Ural region. Those who refused to attend were denied official licenses to oversee

mosques in Tatarstan. That such activity was "unprecedented" suggests these policy shifts may have frustrated not only extremist sects but even moderate groups with different doctrinal interpretations. As mentioned in the earlier news sources, restrictions to the hajj also alienated many Muslim community members.

Islamic institutions likely faced more pressure from the federal center to standardize doctrinal principles across Tatarstan and weed out religious extremism as the 2014 Sochi Olympics drew closer. These changes created perceived grievances specific to the Tatar populace to justify the Kazan terrorist attacks in July 2012, which challenges the notion that the call for armed resistance originated from the global jihad orientation of the Caucasus Emirate. Though a shocking act of political violence, the July incident does not necessarily represent an increasing trend of Islamic radicalization in the Volga-Ural region but was perhaps an isolated intra-communal strike by an opportunistic fringe group. However, many Muslim community members still opposed the state-influenced policies of Mufti Faizov, indicating the sentiment for more radical behavior may exist in the religious community of Tatarstan.

The English language daily newspaper *The Moscow Times* thickens the plot surrounding the Kazan terrorist attacks presented in the previous media outlets. Started in 1992 for foreigners working in Russia, the publication now attracts Russian readers as well, delivering to 500 locations around Moscow and actively updating a detailed website with an archive of over 130,000 articles. *The Moscow Times* upholds a standard of precise, reliable, and independent information and provides a platform for more liberal views against the Russian government.[100]

On 26 October 2012, *The Moscow Times* published an article titled "Slain Kazan Gunmen Planned Terror Attack,"[101] which identifies the possible culprits of the Kazan terrorist attacks. The report provides a gripping account of a federal security operation against two

additional suspects in the July incident, Robert Valeyev and Ruslan Kashapov, who intended to carry out a terrorist attack on an upcoming Muslim holiday. The authorities killed the gunmen following a firefight that lasted several hours and a dangerous raid during which an officer sacrificed himself when one of the militants attempted to ignite an explosive device. Weapons, ammunition, a bomb-making laboratory, and 3 kilograms of explosives were recovered at the scene of the confrontation.

Unidentified law enforcement officials claim "the gunmen were part of an Islamic terrorist organization with links to the Taliban and that they had trained in camps on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border." Another cited source in the article identifies the "Islamic terrorist organization" as Bulgar-Uyghur Jamaat, a militant group in North Waziristan established in 2006 by Pavel Dorokhov, a native of Bashkortostan, for Volga-Ural Muslims to wage jihad against Russia. The article conspicuously leaves out any reference to the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan and their connection to the Caucasus Emirate. Emphasizing the involvement of the Taliban creates the rather sensationalized impression of a growing foreign extremist influence on Muslim individuals in Russia.

Drawing from *NTV, The Kazan Herald*, and *The Moscow Times*, the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan, Caucasus Emirate, Bulgar-Uyghur Jamaat, and the Taliban all loosely interconnect in claiming responsibility for the Kazan terrorist attacks. This vast array of non-state transnational actors, proponents of the al-Qaeda brand, potentially involved in the incident seems to suggest an increasing trend of Islamic radicalization throughout southwestern Russia. Furthermore, with the impending NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Bulgar-Uyghur Jamaat may gain more latitude to strengthen operations in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Such a conclusion markedly

contrasts the more conservative assessment of the Kazan terrorist attacks as an isolated act of intra-communal conflict stemming from changes in hajj operations.

A few months after the October incident presented in *The Moscow Times*, the state-controlled Russian language news channel *Perviy Kanal* reported more extensive federal security operations against Muslims, indicating government apprehension over the perceived growth of religious extremism following the Kazan terrorist attacks. A broadcast headlined "Large-Scale Security Operation Held in St. Peterburg"[102] on 9 February 2013 states authorities arrested 271 individuals for inciting hatred and terrorism. The news clip firmly characterizes these hundreds of people as all "followers of radical Islam" and subjectively suggests that "it is appropriate to name [them] fanatics" according to information provided on the raids. Investigators cited in the report speculate that foreign sponsors provided funds and literature to the extremist faction, insinuating the growing influence of radical groups from abroad. The discovery of 20 people without official documents also corroborates this claim. In the last few comments, the broadcast emphasizes the unprecedented scale of the federal security operation for battling radical Islam.

Through periodic arrests of large groups of Muslims, the federal government likely strives to create the appearance of soundly handling the problem of religious extremism throughout Russia. However, such security operations may alienate Muslim populations in the Volga-Ural region who identify with other ethnic minorities through Islam and condemn the indiscriminate detentions of potentially innocent individuals. Other media sources estimate no less than 700 arrests occurred during the February operation.[103] Returning to *The Kazan Herald* article, government overreaction threatens to bolster the trend of Islamic radicalization in Russia.

As presented in *The Moscow Times* and *Perviy Kanal*, the Russian language national newspaper *Kommersant* further depicts the forceful government response to an anticipated rise in

terrorism before the 2014 Sochi Olympics. With a circulation of 87,000 papers across Moscow, it claims to be "one of the most authoritative and influential publications for Russia's decision-makers." Founded in 1989, the paper became Russia's first business daily a few years later and expanded under the ownership of exiled oligarch, Boris Berezovksy. In 2006, Alisher Usmanov, a steel magnate with holdings in state-controlled Gazprom, purchased the news outlet. *Kommersant* generally reports with a liberal slant more critical of the Russian government.[104]

Kommersant published an article titled "Extreme Measures to Prepare for Extremists"[105] on 20 March 2013, which objectively discusses the newly proposed punishments for extremist groups in Tatarstan. The news story begins with a thorough analysis of these amendments to the criminal code, which regional justice officials mean to enact "in consideration of the State Duma." Such euphemistic language suggests the federal center possibly coerced the regional government into imposing these legal changes, increasing term limits by multiple years and fines by hundreds of thousands of rubles for individuals convicted of extremism. The article offers some justifications for the new laws in describing recent "manifestations of radical Islamic ideology" such as the Kazan terrorist attacks, the capture of a Salafi terrorist group in January, and illegal protests by Hizb-ut-Tahrir last year. But the remainder of the text abruptly switches to interviews with multiple individuals severely critical of the proposed amendments. Primarily, human rights activist Lev Ponomarev argues the "North Caucasus shows that repressive policies do not solve the problem" and predicts there "will be many more innocent convictions that will increase the number of terrorist attacks." In comparison to all the aforementioned news sources, *Kommersant* provides a more balanced view of the situation developing in the Volga-Ural region by incorporating many different opinions on the effectiveness of these legal changes.

By pushing for harsher laws against extremist groups in Tatarstan, the federal government aims to undermine projected threats of terrorism in the run-up to the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Such revisions to the criminal code grant security forces extraordinary law enforcement powers, potentially infringing on the rights of religious minorities. As discussed in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article, the Tatarstan Spiritual Board of Muslims prefers teachings based in the Hanafi school of religious thought. If deemed extremist in nature, moderate groups with different doctrinal interpretations face even more serious penalties for not following the standardized system or simply challenging the arbitrariness of police detentions. Adherents of religious fundamentalism may also propagate these further injustices against their faith, enjoying more success in the recruitment of individuals frustrated with state policies. As inferred from previously analyzed media sources, the trend of Islamic radicalization in the Volga-Ural region possibly increases as a consequence of government overreaction. The outrage of local human rights activists suggests the federal center lacks legitimacy in taking such drastic measures against supposed extremists in the religious community of Tatarstan.

The Russian language national newspaper *Izvestia* describes an incident of apparent retaliatory terrorism in response to the expansion of federal security operations. With a present day circulation of about 235,000 papers in Moscow, it began as a small left-wing paper during the 1917 revolutions, quickly swinging across the aisle during the Soviet Union era. In the 1990s, their reporting revived a reputation as serious and independent; however, quality suffered after the sale to Gazprom-Media in 2004, the oil conglomerate with close ties to the state.[106] Despite having switched owners again, the slant tends to be to attack liberal opposition and the West. The opinions expressed in *Izvestia* may best be attributed as more generally in line with the views of the Russian government.

On 21 October 2013, *Izvestia* published an article titled "Bandits Respond to Special Forces Operation with Terrorist Attack in Volgograd."[107] A 30 year-old female suicide bomber, Naida Asiyalova, detonated her explosives on a city bus, killing 6 people and critically injuring 22 other passengers. Her 22 year-old accomplice and husband, Dmitri Sokolov, organized two prior terrorist attacks in Dagestan. After introducing the facts of the incident, the publication discusses the radicalization of Sokolov, stating the "Russian Wahhibist" to be of "even more interest." Details on his disappearance, recruitment, and hostilities abound without any reference to the background of Asiyalova. Through the selection of such content, the article seems to sensationalize the threat of Islamic radicalization for ethnic Russians. The next section emphasizes how the "special forces do not rule out that the terror attack in Volgograd was militants' revenge for the latest successful operation in the North Caucasus," proceeding to describe several other federal security operations in recent weeks. The depth of detail provided on the tit for tat violence between the authorities and militants supports the presumption in the story headline.

In a more objective manner, the article quotes General Lieutenant of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Alexander Gurov, who asserts the suicide bombing was "absolutely senseless," not planned retaliatory terrorism. Law enforcement officials prefer to stress their missions deter violence as opposed to incite more extremist activity. Such a deflection aims to undermine the conclusion that federal government overreaction reinforces the trend of Islamic radicalization in Russia. Another passage states that different security officials think the "terrorist attack could connect to the preparation for the Olympics in Sochi." Past KGB colonel, Oleg Nechiporenko, even predicts "after the terrorist attack the degree of tension will rise at the Olympics and the incident can push fanatical individuals to action, who will possibly perceive it

as a call to act." Former head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) criticizes the agency for placing too much attention on extremism, "forgetting terrorism," and not surmising that militants may choose sites for terrorist attacks based on smaller security force presence. These comments provide various insights into state apprehension over the Volgograd bus bombing less than two years after the similarly alarming Kazan terrorist attacks.

Through Constant Comparative Content Analysis of multiple Russian media sources, certain provisional conclusions on two core categories, federal security operations and influence of religious institutions, inform the trend of Islamic radicalization in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to this movement. The Kazan terrorist attacks greatly unnerve federal officials, who fear the spread of religious extremism to the historically peaceful Volga-Ural region. Though news bulletins in *NTV* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* cite the frustration of many Muslims with local policies on hajj operations and doctrinal standardization, the religious communities of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan appear relatively stable with only the October security operation against two suspected terrorists as definitive proof of subsequent radical behavior following the July incident. Reports from *NTV* and *The Moscow Times* still sensationalize a growing foreign influence from the Taliban-backed Bulgar-Uyghur Jamaat to the Mujahedeen of Tatarstan. *The Kazan Herald* article initially downplays the threat, soberly questioning the link between these groups and the Caucasus Emirate, but suggests federal government overreaction potentially bolsters Islamic radicalization in Russia. State-controlled *Perviy Kanal* and liberal *Kommersant* offer evidence of expanding federal security operations and proposed legal changes against extremist groups that threaten to alienate other Muslim populations. In light of the Volgograd bus bombing discussed in *Izvestia*, the Russian government likely faces further dangers from religious extremism in the run-up to the

2014 Sochi Olympics and remains wary of expanding Islamic radicalization in the Volga-Ural region following the withdrawal of NATO forces from Central Asia.

CHAPTER 6: ACQUISITION OF GREATER REGIONAL AUTONOMY THROUGH ETHNIC NATIONALISM

Esteemed scholar Anthony D. Smith defines nationalism as the formation of "a named and self-defined community whose members cultivate common myths, memories, symbols and values, possess and disseminate a distinctive public culture, reside in and identify with a historical homeland, and create and disseminate common laws and shared customs."[108] The ethnic classification also involves emphasis on shared genealogical descent and perceived bonds of kinship between members of the group.[109] This dynamic process of creating an imagined community and common identity deserves consideration in the context of the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Through the application of Constant Comparative Content Analysis, the following combination of Russian media sources relevant to two core categories, pursuit of regional autonomy and identity formation, illustrates the trend of ethnic nationalism in the Volga-Ural region. Ultimately, though national separatist groups increased radical activity following the Kazan terrorist attacks, the regional governments strategically manipulate ethnic nationalism in order to secure greater autonomy from the federal center.

The Russian language newspaper *Izvestia* published an article titled "100 People Protested Large-Scale Arrests in Center of Kazan"[110] on 29 July 2012, a little over a week after the Kazan terrorist attacks, which describes the response of a major ethnic nationalist group to the consequences of the incident. "Azatlyk," a word of Turkic origin meaning "Freedom," organized a protest of over 100 people to condemn the indiscriminate arrests of Muslims in Kazan amidst the Russian government efforts to apprehend the culprits of the car bombing and shooting. In an interview with *Izvestia*, the leader of Azatlyk, Nail Nabiullin, equates such actions to "all-pervasive repression" of Muslims in Tatarstan. Though a neutral tone permeates

the article, certain parts may be construed as showing favor to the Russian government. The article begins by describing the protest as in defense of the detainees in the case of the terrorist attacks. A passage near the end cites local media reporting hundreds of detainees, who police deem "likely perpetrators," characterized as ideologues of radical Wahhabism or those in conflict with the Mufti's and his deputies' interests.

Such a presentation of the facts creates an interesting association between a major ethnic nationalist group and Muslim detainees as Azatlyk defending the "likely perpetrators" of the Kazan terrorist attacks. As touched upon in the history chapter, nationalists in the late Soviet Union often utilized Islam to unify the populace in bolstering their shared nationality. Azatlyk likely promotes their frustration with the unfounded detention of multiple innocent Muslim Tatars to illustrate their perceived political plight, not to support religious extremism. On the other hand, state-influenced *Izvestia* subtly implies that this ethnic nationalism actually reinforces the Islamic radicalism of the Kazan terrorist attacks. Coloring the protests in this light gives the government legitimacy in tackling supposed radical elements in religious and nationalist camps. The evident use of these strategies illustrates how the federal government actively works to suppress supposed extremism in the regions of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

The Russian and English language Georgian newspaper *Georgia Times* elaborates on the issues discussed in *Izvestia*. Unfortunately, no information is readily available on the history of the *Georgia Times*; however, archival data suggests that publications have occurred since 2008. Tense diplomatic relations between Russia and Georgia in recent years implies a bias more critical of Kremlin policies. The brief 2008 Russo-Georgian War over South Ossetia supports this claim.

An opinion piece titled "Tatar nationalists are losing ground,"[111] published in the *Georgia Times* on 23 October 2012, gives an in-depth analysis of the role Azatlyk serves following the Kazan terrorist attacks. An interview with Nail Nabiullin reveals useful information on the origins and operations of Azatlyk. Nabiullin secured leadership thanks to his family connection with writer Fauzia Bayramova, known as the "grandmother of Tatar nationalism." He was expelled from school multiple times for his nationalist ideas, imagining the future of Tatarstan in a state stretching from the Caucasus to Lake Baikal with help from Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

This article incorporates the views of Vasili Ivanov, a security specialist at the state-backed Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI), who believes Nabiullin remains semi-successful because the "Kazan Kremlin" wishes to exaggerate the threat of national separatism for bargaining power with Moscow. He claims the Tatar bureaucracy is even providing financial support for Azatlyk in the form of rent for their office, legal aid, and print materials. If this assertion bears some semblance of truth, then the regional government may be backing ethnic nationalist groups in order to secure more concessions from the federal center. Such a state of affairs implies that intentional political machinations precipitate the appearance of present-day ethnic nationalism, not a growing movement of Tatar or Bashkir individuals developing a national identity outside of the Russian Federation.

Another RISI expert, Yana Amelin, suggests radical Islam represents a greater threat than national separatism in Tatarstan, citing conclusions of the American Foreign Policy Council who visited in 2010. The *Georgia Times* proceeds to speculate on the ambitions of Azatlyk deputy of ideology, Airat Shakirov, a Salafi preacher better known as Sheikh Umar and one of seven officially arrested for questioning regarding the Kazan terrorist attacks. His close connection

with Nabiullin seemingly suggests the potential "transformation of a very young man from moderate Hanafi into armed Wahhabi-Salafist may occur for a short time." Though proposing a decline in ethnic nationalism, the *Georgia Times* debatably exaggerates the radicalization of the moderate Azatlyk likely to accentuate the internal security problems of Russia in dealing with Islamic radicalization.

The Russian and English language news portal *Kavkaz Center* supports the connection between national separatists and religious extremists similarly presented in reports from *Izvestia* and *Georgia Times*. Founded in the city of Grozny in Chechnya in 1999, it serves as the primary media wing for the Caucasus Emirate, a militant network in the North Caucasus.[112] Movladi Udugov, former Minister of Information for Chechnya and top propagandist for the Caucasus Emirate, currently controls the website. Naturally, the opinions expressed often harshly criticize policies of the Russian government and overtly call for the creation of an Islamic state in Russia. The Russian government considers all information on *Kavkaz Center* to be extremist and terrorist material.

Kavkaz Center posted an article headlined "In Kazan Protest of Muslim Peoples Against Robberies of Moscow"[113] on 25 January 2013 praising the activities of Azatlyk in unsurprisingly stark contrast to the skepticism presented in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. In this interview, Nabiullin places particular emphasis on Batu Khan as the true founder of the federation, aiming to establish the historical legitimacy of the Tatar people. He announces Azatlyk will be holding protests across the country on days honoring the burnings of major Russian cities during the Golden Horde era. A thorough outreach campaign involving the distribution of books and calendars coupled with public lectures and presentations on Batu Khan is described as well. *Kavkaz Center* uses harsh rhetoric throughout the article with phrases such as the "ungrateful Russian

occupiers" and the "battle against the common Russian enemy." The piece concludes with a brief reference to the recent formation of an alliance between Azatlyk and a Bashkir nationalist group called Kuk Bure. As the news wing of a terrorist network, the *Kavkaz Center* support for Azatlyk activities suggests interplay between the trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism.

The Russian language regional newspaper *Svobodnoe Slovo* verifies the operational cooperation between Tatar Azatlyk and Bashkir Kuk Bure after the Kazan terrorist attacks. This online publication claims to "talk without censorship about politics in the Chuvash republic and Russia."[114] With the oldest article dating back only a few years, it is likely a fairly unknown news outlet. However, the location of Chuvashia directly west of Tatarstan suggests the website shares insightful opinions on the Kazan area and in opposition to the Russian government.

On 8 December 2012, *Svobodnoe Slovo* published an article titled "In Seven Russian Republics Actions Held In Defense of National Languages."[115] Tatar Azatlyk attracted close to 50 people in Kazan while Kuk Bure organized a protest in Ufa to protect the Bashkir language. The last passage criticizes a new federal law, which "guarantees the obtainment of education in the Russian language." Since language represents a crucial tool of mobilization for identity formation, Tatar and Bashkir ethnic nationalist groups feel threatened by perceived cultural homogenization policies of the Russian government. In marked contrast to *Izvestia* and *Georgia Times*, *Svobodnoe Slovo* portrays these protestors as peaceful activists, not as nationalist separatists on the verge of radicalizing like religious extremists of the Kazan terrorist attacks.

The Russian language national newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* expounds on the political exploitation of ethnic nationalism initially mentioned in *Georgia Times*. On 15 January 2013, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published an article titled "The Second Invasion of Batu,"[116]

discussing the activities of Azatlyk for the year 2013. Notably, the piece begins by categorizing the group members as "radical Tatar nationalists." Such a characterization readily relates to the *Izvestia* underlying association between Azatlyk and the "likely perpetrators" of the Kazan terrorist attacks and interestingly compares with the *Georgia Times* assessment of Azatlyk as still more moderate but harboring the potential to radicalize. Despite hastily labeling the group as radicals, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* downgrades the influence of Azatlyk with an underhanded tone. Nabiullin shares in an interview that Azatlyk has declared 2013 as the year of Batu Khan, a ruler during the Golden Horde empire, to remember the greats periods of history for the Volga-Ural peoples. Unlike the *Kavkaz Center*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* critically comments that Batu Khan was actually an initiator of the destruction for Volga Bulgaria, the cradle of the Tatar nation. This observation shows how Azatlyk actively constructs and integrates more suitable heroes in history to bolster their modern day national identity. Since Batu Khan was clearly not Russian, the Tatar nationalists may claim him as their own savior from the past.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta further attacks the credibility of Azatlyk later in the article. Despite intentions to distribute 150,000 calendars and 2,000 books describing the glories of Batu Khan, the opponents of Azatlyk are reported as not taking their initiatives seriously. The next passage still argues that the followers of the radical nationalists are not weakening but will become stronger. In a similar vein to the *Georgia Times*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* explains the "Kazan Kremlin" uses the radicals to play political games with Moscow. This again implies the Tatar bureaucracy exploits ethnic nationalism as a bargaining chip for negotiations with the federal center, serving as the main impetus for bolstering the imagined community of Azatlyk. The article ends somewhat ominously in claiming that such political maneuvering represents the

last attempts of the "Kazan Kremlin" before President Putin eliminates the autonomous republics.

On 8 August 2013, another *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article titled "Carte Blanche: Tatar Call to Unite Once Again"[117] further discusses the political manipulation of ethnic nationalism for stronger regional autonomy. The report begins with the announcement that the President of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnihanov, developed a "new conception of national politics," making Kazan the "spiritual center of all the Tatar people." Such a bold claim directly challenges the federal mandate to support ethnic minorities in the federation. The next passage describes the past constructive relationship between the former President of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev, and "radical national separatists" in their quest for sovereignty during the early 1990s. But once the federal center offered complete freedom, "carte blanche," to local elites, regional support for ethnic nationalists diminished.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta argues that President Minnihanov should chart a "new political course" away from the earlier legacy of former President Shaimiev but admits his recent policies on national politics do not greatly differ from those of old. Such a subjective tone signals disapproval more in line with the federal center. The increase in places to study the Tatar language also shows the reinforcement of Tatar identity. Tatar officials clearly responded to the Azatlyk protests highlighted in *Svobodnoe Slovo*. In light of these developments, the article concludes with speculation over whether the regional government strives to "receive maximum political freedoms in exchange for the elimination of ghostly separatist threats." This analysis offers evidence of attempts to acquire greater regional autonomy through ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan.

The Russian language national news portal *REGNUM* provides proof of similar initiatives in Bashkortostan. Started in 1999, this online publication covers issues in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. The website describes itself as a "federal news agency." In an interview last year, editor-in-chief, Vigen Akopyan, explained the mission of the media outlet involves opposing fascism and policies in conflict with Russia.[118] Thus, *REGNUM* likely crafts articles more in line with the views of the Russian government.

REGNUM published an article headlined "In Ufa Parents of Students Complained To Prosecutor of Officials Sabotaging the Language Question"[119] on 13 September 2013. Despite the federal mandate discussed in *Svobodnoe Slovo*, the Minister of Education in Bashkortostan, Alfis Gaizov, announced in early September that students in Russian language schools will study the Bashkir language. Furthermore, he states that parents reserve the right to choose the language of study for the schools of their children. But parents attest that administrative officials "rudely intervene in the school process," imposing the "study of Russian language and literature." Interviewees express frustration with the conflicting judgments of the regional Bashkir ministry and local Russian administrators. *REGNUM* provides an objective look at the growing tension along ethnic nationalist lines between the federal center, regional government, and educational institutions in Bashkortostan a year after the Kazan terrorist attacks.

The Russian language national newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* describes a key federal government response to the recent impunity of the regional governments. With a circulation of 171,000 papers, it publishes twice a week. In June 2006, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and businessman Alexander Lebedev purchased the paper from the staff. The publication enjoys a high reputation for investigative journalism and often criticizes the Russian government for their policies in the North Caucasus.[120] Though speculation abounds, most

suspect the state sponsored the assassinations of *Novaya Gazeta* journalists, Anna Politkovskaya and Yury Shchekochikhin, for their high-profile reporting.

On 15 September 2013, *Novaya Gazeta* published an article titled "In Kazan Activists of the Tatar Nationalist Movement Began Indefinite Political Hunger Strike."[121] The report details how city officials evicted Azatlyk and the All-Tatar Societal Center from their building of operations for the last 17 years. The groups decided to partake in a more radical protest, beginning an "indefinite hunger strike" to propagate their grievances. Commenting on the situation, the participants believe the seizure of the building is a "political provocation" meant to hasten the "elimination of the Republic of Tatarstan" and the "final assimilation of Tatar and non-Russian peoples." As a result of nationality policies specified in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *REGNUM*, the federal center likely pressured the regional governments to shut down Azatlyk. Such action suggests federal government apprehension over the bolstered ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Furthermore, selecting the hunger strike strategy signals more radical behavior on the part of nationalist separatists, possibly seeking the path of martyrdom similar to religious extremists.

After analyzing the Kazan terrorist attacks through the core categories of identity formation and pursuit of regional autonomy, certain provisional conclusions emerge on the developing trend of ethnic nationalism in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and the government reaction to this movement. Primarily, the resurgence of the Tatar nationalist group Azatlyk in the national spotlight appears to be the most noticeable effect of the July incident. As detailed in *Izvestia*, the indiscriminate detentions of several Muslims created a rallying point for rejuvenated ethnic nationalism and justifiable frustration with the Russian government. Reports from *Kavkaz Center* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discussed how Azatlyk also initiated a well-timed

outreach campaign in declaring 2013 as the year of Batu Khan to fuel Tatar solidarity amidst the outrage with the federal center. The *Svobodnoe Slovo* article offers evidence of a budding alliance between two ethnic minorities youth groups with a history of suspicion and mistrust, Tatar Azatlyk and Bashkir Kuk Bure. The collaboration suggests trans-republican identity formation across the Volga-Ural region.

However, *Georgia Times* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* assert that Azatlyk does not pose a serious threat to the internal security of Russia since the Kazan Kremlin often supports the activities of the group in order to have more leverage in negotiating with Moscow. *REGNUM* presents similar attempts by the government of Bashkortostan to manipulate ethnic nationalism for greater regional autonomy. This implies separatist movements represent the lesser of two threats in comparison to a potential rise in Islamic radicalization. It is crucial to emphasize that these two trends are not mutually exclusive. Despite claims that the activities of Azatlyk are regionally controlled, the primary propaganda wing of the Chechen rebels continues to back their efforts. A high-ranking member of Azatlyk even ended up as a key suspect in the Kazan terrorist attacks.

As described in *Svobodnoe Slovo*, Azatlyk mostly operates in the realm of peaceful political activism; however, if such demonstrations become larger and subsequently repressed by the Tatar bureaucracy under orders from the federal center, then political violence may become the only alternative to address their grievances. Through the help of the media, the groundwork for an imagined community associating ethnic nationalists with religious extremists already exists in articles of *Izvestia*, *Georgia Times*, *Nezavisimaya*, and *Kavkaz Center*. Increased government backlash only gives further recognition to this constructed reality. In response to the seizure of their base of operations, the Azatlyk hunger strike reported in *Novaya Gazeta*

represents more radical behavior on par with common strategies of terrorist groups. Presently, the Tatar and Bashkir separatist movements remain relatively small as the regional governments strategically control ethnic nationalism to acquire stronger political sovereignty in the Russian Federation.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

As evidenced in the widespread media coverage associated with the Kazan terrorist attacks, the following conclusions emerge on the trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to these developments. First, outside of a few isolated incidents, the religious communities of both republics appear relatively stable, not increasingly radicalizing to commit political violence from frustration with new policies of local spiritual leaders. But increasing federal security operations to secure the 2014 Sochi Olympics and resurging Islamic terrorism following the NATO withdrawal from Central Asia threaten to alienate more Volga-Ural Muslim individuals. Second, though national separatist groups increased radical activity following the Kazan terrorist attacks, the regional governments of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan strategically manipulate ethnic nationalism to acquire greater autonomy from the federal center. Supported by the underlying implications of the aforementioned Russian media sources, credible threats of religious extremism and national separatism presently exist on only a small scale in the Volga-Ural region but harbor the potential to grow in the near future.

Recent research conducted by the Foundation for Civil Society Development also confirms the relative peace and security of the Volga-Ural region in recent years. On 15 August 2013, this Russian non-governmental organization, "whose main focus of research is in the fields of politics, regional development, and contemporary media," released a study on the social well-being of citizens across the Russian republics.[122] The results provide interesting insights into the stability of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Both territories received the highest ratings with over 65% of interviewees content with their social well-being in the Volga-Ural region. By comparison, the republics of the North Caucasus, Volgograd, and even Moscow all earned lower

scores. Notably, the 56,900 responses were collected in February and May of 2012 before the Kazan terrorist attacks. Amidst potentially increasing trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism from government overreaction, foreign extremist influence, and political manipulation, this national poll suggests the Muslim populations of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan remain largely content with their standard of living. The survey data implies the majority of Tatar and Bashkir individuals reject calls for national separatism and religious extremism in the run-up to the 2014 Sochi Olympics and the imminent withdrawal of NATO forces from Central Asia.

In conclusion, this study establishes the necessary academic groundwork to inform future research on the trends of Islamic radicalization and ethnic nationalism in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the government reaction to a potential rise in extremism. I believe the qualitative methodology of Constant Comparative Content Analysis served as a semi-effective initial framework for addressing government bias and news sensationalism in Russian media to draw accurate conclusions on these topics of interest. However, conducting interviews and disseminating surveys in the field represent the next steps of this research in order to more thoroughly assess the threats of religious extremism and national separatism in the Volga-Ural region. I intend to return to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan to expand on the work presented in this senior honors thesis. In the wake of the Kazan terrorist attacks and Boston Marathon bombings, the continuation of this project aims to contribute to the growing body of research on the dangers of ethnic minority conflicts for Russian internal security and the international community.

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